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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000490

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TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV CG
SUBJECT: TROUBLING DEVELOPMENTS IN ITURI

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Both MONUC Head of Office Sharu Sharif and Ituri District Commissioner Petronelle Vaweka told PolCouns March 22 that the militia group MRC, under the leadership of Peter Karim, is planning to attack Bunia. The MRC has augmented its numbers by recruiting disgruntled ex-combatants who have not yet received their demobilization packages. MONUC has reported for the last several weeks that arms trafficking routes from Uganda into Ituri, which had essentially been inactive for the last several months, have been reactivated. Arms are "flooding" into Ituri again from Uganda, according to MONUC reports, which are substantiated by an upsurge in aggressive attacks by well-armed MRC and FRPI militia against both FARDC and MONUC forces throughout the southern part of Orientale province, ranging from Djugu (on Lake Albert) to villages a mere 10 kms from Bunia itself. MONUC forces in Ituri are almost completely tied down in protecting civilians in these southern villages, severely limiting its capacity to try to intercept incoming arms.

¶2. (C) According again to both Congolese and MONUC sources, there appears to be coordination between FRPI forces operating in the area of Tcheli and those of the MRC in the zone around Bunia, another new and disturbing element. NGOs trying to work on demobilization efforts have for weeks reported rising unrest among ex-combatants in Bunia, and have warned of the possibility that as a result they could be open to recruitment by one or both militia groups, as now seems to be the case. Meanwhile, militia attacks have provoked a new, large wave of IDPs, many of whom have, as in the past, fled to Bunia itself, which risks again becoming a long-term IDP refuge.

Comment

¶3. (C) It seems possible to us that the Ugandan supplies are indeed stepping up support to the militias and perhaps encouraging them in their attacks on MONUC and the FARDC. Unauthorized penetration by Ugandan forces into DRC territory could have a profoundly destabilizing effect not only on bilateral relations but perhaps the DRC's fragile electoral process as well.

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